

BOLLYWOOD ENABLING INDIA AS A SOFT POWER

A critical overview of pros and cons of
post-critical assumptions

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Introduction

This chapter critiques the existing school of thought that characterizes Bollywood as India's flagship soft power, basing this assertion on limited and often contradictory perspectives drawn from postmodern and post-critical theories. This study not only elaborates on inherent shortcomings in this lopsided approach but also argues that Tollywood (the Telugu film and television industry) is more deserving of being nominated as India's flagship soft power asset, taking India's deeper culture and tradition into consideration. Engaging the three important definitions that Nye (2011) offered for soft power and interpolating them with the discussion of heritage and contemporary soft power sources in Ch. 1 (See Tables 1.1.1.4 and 1.1.1.5), this study is primarily grounded in the modernist/foundationist (Bauman 1991; Smith 2001) perspective of cultural theory.

It was in fact Nye who suggested Bollywood as a possible candidate for being India's flagship soft power asset (Nye 2005; Athique 2012, p. 114). Nye does not profess expert knowledge of Indian cinema and his nomination of Bollywood need not be taken as irrefutable. Nevertheless, after Nye's identification of Bollywood as a possible key soft power resource for Indian cultural diplomacy (Diwakar 2006), many scholars hastened to produce a meta-theorization of Bollywood as a soft power asset.

Tharoor (2008), a former UN diplomat and writer, has argued that a range of India's fine arts and culture – that includes yoga, cuisine, sports and Bollywood cinema – would serve to tell a different but captivating story to the world. Much of the meta-theorizations of Bollywood as soft power relied on an understanding of culture in its broadest sense. This included films first, with themes about the Indian diaspora; second, earning significant revenue in US dollars; and third, offering a wide-angle picture of India's technological, infrastructural and consumer cultural transformation, showing its fine-tuned alignment with globalization. Nonetheless, these factors of theorization promoting Bollywood as soft power are fundamentally flawed, and raise four issues that are central to the theorization itself.

The culture- and tradition-related issues are as follows:

- The culture and tradition portrayed by Bollywood films does not reflect the historical depth of traditional Indian culture and values (Murthy 2015).
- The moniker 'Bollywood' (see Rajadhyaksha 2003, 2013) is a highly contested one, and does not represent Indian cinema in its cultural breadth (Murthy *et al.* 2015).
- Tollywood (the Telugu film industry) incorporates rich cross-cultural and traditional Indian values that range from the past into the era of post-globalization, and it is therefore reasonable to consider it as a potential flagship soft power resource for India (Murthy *et al.* 2015; Murthy 2012).
- Films espousing core traditional values, incorporating fine art as well as traditional crafts¹, need to be present in an industry for it to be eligible for consideration as the Indian flagship soft power resource (Murthy 2014).

The remainder of this chapter seeks to throw light on these issues and demonstrate how Tollywood rather than Bollywood draws on heritage culture in the form of core values, high cultural art and traditional crafts whereas Bollywood depends more on contemporary culture.

Culture as a principal referent for soft power

Nye's (2011) definition makes it clear that culture is central to the thesis of soft power. Here, culture implies traditional values (See Table 1.1.1.4 for tangible and intangible sources under heritage and contemporary categories). Noted analyst Raja Mohan (2003) argues that ancient Indian spiritualism, buttressed by yoga and propagated by *Gurus* (Masters), has spread across the globe over centuries earning for India a reputation as a source of light and wisdom. Thussu (2013) offers a vivid account of how ancient spiritual values and traditional culture, especially Buddhism, contributed immensely to the collective wisdom of the world (p. 10). As noted earlier, Tharoor (2008) placed enormous emphasis on India's cultural assets, its cultural heritage that was carefully preserved and passed down to the present over millennia. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (2011) said that the grandeur of Indian classical traditions has earned applause and appreciation around the world.

These statements center on India's ancient, rich and varied culture in which are embedded the *Upanishad* epic and *Upanishadic* values. These scriptures employ a unique logical approach based on the *Advaita Darshanam Siddhanta* (school of non-duality) in formulating humanist concepts such as *ahimsa* (non-violence), *samadarsha*, *samabhaava* (a view that sees all living beings as equal that is superordinate to caste, creed, color and gender segmentation) and *vasudhaika kutumbakam* (a view of the whole planet as a single family). The character of Bollywood has undergone a drastic change in the context of globalization (Rajadhyaksha 2013). The presenting of Bollywood, that today emphasizes Indian diasporic popular culture, in tandem with classical cultural traditions, creates a dissonance and detracts from the soft power of the latter.

What one understands from the foregoing is that the advocates of India's soft power by and large rely on this ancient country's richest and most ancient traditional systems of education, yoga, martial arts, Kama Sutra, family, etc.; its philosophies, such as *Sankhya*, *Nyaya*, *Vaiseshika*, *Mimamsa*, *Jyothisha* (astrology), *Chandas* (prosody), etc. and its culture as seen in festivals, functions, ceremonies, temple traditions (*Agama Sastras*) and *Yagnyas* (rituals involving fire and ghee) as well as fine arts. Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to examine how different scholars defined 'culture' in literature.

According to Tylor (1920, 1871, p. 1), culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. The *Cambridge English Dictionary* states that culture is “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time”. Geertz (1973, p. 89) advocates “cutting of the culture concept down to size, therefore actually insuring its continued importance and defines a semiotic concept of culture” as “webs of significance”. He distinguishes analytically between “the cultural and social aspects of human life” and sees culture as an “ordered system of meaning and of symbols, in terms of which social interaction takes place, while social system is the pattern of social interaction itself” (p. 144). Therefore “cultural structure and social structure are not mere reflexes of one another, but independent and interdependent variables”, states Geertz (p. 169).

According to Fornas (1995), culture is the necessary interplay between contextualized creative practices and ordered sets of symbolic forms. The modern hermeneutic-semiotic concept of culture has been created in a dialogue between the humanities and social sciences in which the narrow and the broader concepts have met and modified each other (Fornas 1995, p. 137).

Bauman (1991) argues that modernity is the beginning point of any culture today. Modernity, according to Bauman, is an ordered system of way-of-life that also brings into existence legitimated oppressive hierarchies, laws of regulation and structured societies that remove individual insecurities. All schools of thought – whether they are Indian or Marxist or any other western philosophical thought or any ‘-ism’ – will fall under this definition of modernity. This construction is also called modernist/foundationist, referring to the earliest primordial cultural hierarchy. In the course of time, this modernity will open up new ways of thinking and living, as no social system is absolutely perfect and rigid as such for long. The complexities of life in social interaction will automatically lead to structural changes in culture as predicted by Fornas (op. cit.).

As such, modernist/foundationist society can also be called a structuralist society that claims to regulate society by virtue of laws in order to bring harmony and peace to members. Structuralist societies and their rules and regulations claim universal acceptance and validity of their values, culture and traditions, as most of them are drawn from religious texts, philosophical traditions and observances (both in the east and the west). In other words, modernist/foundationist societies stake a claim to bringing order into human conduct through rationalities, ideologies, principles and values (Smith 2001). Furthermore, they establish binaries of opposition as part of cultural conventions and signs in social systems (Smith 2001).

While there are digressions from modernist/foundationist society to ‘postmodern’ society, there is no consensual definition for postmodernism as of now. Many scholars consider ‘postmodernism’ as synonymous to ‘post-structuralism’, though there are as many who argue against this conflation. The primary contention of postmodern scholars is that ‘modernist/foundationist’ societies founded on structuralist patterns have failed to afford egalitarian justice to subjects, and thus have turned into feudalistic/capitalistic/patriarchal structures (Bauman 1991). Postmodernism has led subaltern and feminist groups to recourse to decisions that display tendencies of claiming situational rather than universal validity and justice for actions (Smith 2001).

The Oxford Dictionary (online) has described postmodernism as: follows: “A late 20th-century style and concept in the arts, architecture, and criticism, which represents a departure from modernism and is characterized by the self-conscious use of earlier styles

and conventions, a mixing of different artistic styles and media, and a general distrust of theories” (The Oxford Dictionary n.d.). Bauman (1989) has argued that postmodernity is related to consumerism. Sundaram observed that by the late 1960s, the ‘great divide’ of modernism and mass culture in the west was successively destabilized by pop art, counterculture and new strategies of hybridity and cultural citation (Huyssen 1986). But the “post modern condition” that flourished through the 1990s was said to have imploded in the decade after 2000 (Sundaram 2013, p. 4).

Bollywood films that are lionized by both Indian policymakers and Bollywoodized academics are replete with postmodernist culture and appear under the post-critical theoretical framework of Bollywood/Bollywood (Kaur and Sinha 2005, p. 313; Athique 2005) that reflects simulated western culture, architecture and lifestyles to a greater extent than it does Indian heritage culture and values.

Bollywood as soft power: contradictions

Indian heritage culture and values are not easily accommodated in Bollywood post-modern films that carry the values of consumerism as discussed above under ‘Culture as a principal referent for soft power’. The questions to ponder over are as follows. Do Bollywood films, shot in the post-globalization era, serve merely as entertainment for the global Indian diaspora or do they connect them to Indian heritage culture? Are these films indeed capable of enabling members of the diaspora to act as agents of Indian soft power in influencing the policies of their countries of residence in favor of India? If so, what cultural values are the Indian diaspora abstracting from these Bollywood films in projecting Bollywood soft power – postmodernist forms that simply promote multi-dimensional consumerist culture or modernist/foundationist forms that convey Indian heritage culture and values?

Raja Mohan (2003) observes that Bollywood has done more for Indian influence abroad than the bureaucratic efforts of the government. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government of 1998–2004 seemed to view Bollywood as a transmitter of timeless Hindu values, while the Congress Party (2004–14) saw contemporary Indian film as an advanced avatar of India’s rich syncretic culture (Athique 2005, p. 118). In both cases it is diasporic audiences, argues Athique, that are positioned as instruments of soft power in their own right, capable of influencing both Indian and western societies (p. 118). The idea of promoting Bollywood as soft power has thus been endorsed explicitly by successive governments, with India’s then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (2011) stating that India’s soft power is becoming of primary importance in the expansion of India’s global footprint. On the other hand, Hymans (2009, p. 234) argues that “India remains a minor soft power in the contemporary world as it has bypassed the soft power ambitions of its founding generation of leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru”.

The works of Thussu (2013) and Schaefer and Karan (2013) refer to the box office revenue of Bollywood films in post-critical terms to justify Bollywood’s value as a soft power resource. Indeed, Bollywood exports not only attracted the larger diaspora spread across 110 nations, but also drew massive crowds from other cultures to its entertainment extravaganza. Therefore, Bollywoodized academia held the view that just as Hollywood has been a key soft power resource for the US to influence international relations and win in public diplomacy with other countries in the world, Bollywood is also going to be an ‘enabling factor’ in shaping international relations and public diplomacy in India’s favor. However to conflate the ‘consumption culture’ of Bollywood with soft power from

post-critical perspectives using criteria such as ‘marketing, distribution and collection’ at the box office; and from its attractiveness to the Indian diaspora; or in terms of the post-modern nature of Bollywood films² (Athique 2012; Rajadhyaksha 2013; Schaefer 2012; Schaefer and Karan 2013; Thussu 2013), is to stray from the spirit of Indian ‘culture’, ethos and values.

It is not clear as to why Bollywoodized scholars³ assess these films’ ability to transmit Indian heritage values and culture despite their knowing that soft power largely relies on these. In fact, it is postmodern films that have been big revenue earners; these films have themes pertaining to the ethics and compulsions of western life. Furthermore, there is an apparent contradiction in the speeches of Tharoor (2008) and Manmohan Singh (2011). While they emphasize ancient Indian values on the one hand, on the other they advocate Bollywood (especially its latest films – post-1990s) as a major Indian soft power resource (Murthy 2015).

This is precisely what Wagner (2010) pointed out when he stated that India’s Bollywood failed to offer a ‘cultural model’ as an alternative to the Hollywood model. The kind of postmodernism found in the latest Bollywood films raises another fundamental question: has India, in the post-globalization phase, undergone such radical transformation of its ancient culture and value system? In a chapter entitled “India’s soft power: prospects and its limitations”, Wagner (2010) describes Bollywood as a quasi-dream fabric. Blarel (2012) notes that “Bollywood films compared to Hollywood do not reflect or promote a universal model for political and cultural development, and therefore should be seen as mere entertainment”. He describes Bollywood as weak soft power.

Contradictions in the very selection of the moniker ‘Bollywood’ to represent Indian soft power (diasporic) further deepen the current confusion as to which culture and value system Bollywood advocates. The latest Bollywood films, reflecting post-globalization changes undergone by the Indian value system, culture and traditions, disconnect the diaspora from India’s ancient, noble and grand native culture. Rather, these films tend to fuse or homogenize the diaspora with European and American culture of their countries of domicile. Postmodernist Bollywood cinema does not depict Indian culture as an ideal ‘cultural model’ that might be a ‘soft power’ asset in tilting western opinion in favor of India.

Nye (2011) would have expected India to present through Bollywood a model of soft power based on its age-old value systems and traditions, but the present meta-theorization goes against the grain of this. Five gradations, called ‘make-ups’, are identified by Chitty for soft power (Ch. 1). Of the five – composition, conclusion, conciliation, cosmetics and concoction – the first one, composition, refers to core heritage and contemporary values and style of communication of message content (Ch. 1). He considered this as the first make-up. These values are the core values with which society identifies or of which it is made up (Nye 2011). Chitty further states that these may be “treasures from the past, whether architecture, art, literature, language or some other aspect of culture, which may be in passive or active states – heritage soft power” (Ch. 1).

The latest discourse on the term ‘Bollywood’, a derivative of ‘Hollywood’ (see notes in Murthy, 2015), is all the more self-defeating. While the moniker ‘Bollywood’ has had a long existence and is considered as synonymous with the Hindi film industry in north India, Rajadhyaksha (2013), a noted film scholar and post-critical theoretician, has argued for restriction of the use of the term to Hindi films produced after the 1990s (i.e. after India ushered in the forces of globalization). Thus post-globalization Bollywood Hindi cinema symbolized the economic and technological transformation undergone by

India after the 1990s. Subsequently Rajadhyaksha used the term Bollywood to refer to the exportable popular culture largely meant to satiate the Indian diaspora (2013, p. 41).

In other words, the Bollywood films produced after the 1990s portrayed the western cultures and lifestyles that India's metropolises have gradually begun to adopt. With the change of settings from India to overseas locations, new elements entered Bollywood films. These included characters living abroad being played by actors; bikini-clad women dancing to western music; narratives about love triangles (*Kal Ho Na Ho* 2003), multiple marriages and live-in relationships (*Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna* 2006); and the portrayal of premarital sex as a basic right of both spouses. Expanding on Rajadhyaksha's theorization of Bollywood as an exportable industry and coupling it with the discourse on transformation of Bollywood as a soft power, Thussu (2013) writes: "These diaspora oriented films did extremely well in the overseas market even though the receipts collected in this market are subject to international taxes and diasporic audiences represent a small fraction of the total number of viewers for Indian films" (p. 135).

If the term 'Bollywood' encompasses an entire cultural industry as suggested by Rajadhyaksha in the latest refinement of his earlier definition (2013), one would expect some references to Tollywood films and their contribution to diaspora or soft power. No references are to be found to Tollywood in any of the works of Bollywoodized academia. Indeed, the Telugu film industry, a legitimate twin of Hindi cinema since the talkies era (1931), continues to preserve ancient Indian values and cultural and traditional systems by virtue of its ability to produce films of multiple genres in several languages (Murthy 2013). In fact, in the last two decades the synergy of the Telugu film and television industry has immensely contributed to the cultural renaissance of the Telugu diaspora (Bhat and Bhaskar 2007, pp. 104–7). Tollywood is in a strong position to vie with Bollywood for being considered India's flagship soft power asset.

Tollywood: a flagship resource as soft power

Telugu is a regional language spoken by approximately 850 million people who reside in the Indian states of Andhra and Telangana. Prior to 2 June 2014, Telugu-speaking people had only one state, namely, Andhra Pradesh. After division into two states – Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (residual) – Telugu people now have two Telugu-speaking states as the north Indians have multiple Hindi-speaking states. Telugu language, culture and heritage are exceedingly rich; the government of India has declared Telugu as one of India's classical languages, having as it does a 3000-year-old literary tradition. It is the only language in India having both meter and structure in the prosody of its poetry. Nicolo Di Conti described Telugu as the "Italian of the East" because it sounds so mellifluous. Eminent Tamil poet Subrahmanya Bharati praised Telugu, coining the collocation *Sundara Telingi* (beautiful Telugu) in his famous paean on national integration. The Telugu population is widely spread over India and the world, constituting the second-largest Indian diaspora (more than 20 million) both in the US and the UK.

Tollywood invests several times more in films and produces more films than does the Hindi film industry (Kohli-Khandekar 2013, p. 161). Its cross-cultural approach in making films in several languages simultaneously has obscured from Bollywoodized academia its combined investment in film production. Murthy (2013) earlier not only elaborated on Tollywood's multicultural approach, but also showed how the Telugu film industry invested heavily in making films in all other major languages, such as Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada. For instance, the latest release of *Baahubali – The*

Beginning (2015, directed by S. S. Rajamouli), was produced simultaneously in Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi. At about \$15 million, this production received one of the highest investments in the Telugu film industry. On its release worldwide, it has grossed over \$90.5 million.

The Telugu diaspora connection with Tollywood dates back to the 1960s, when early immigrants to the US formed associations or small groups to watch Telugu films carried to the US from India by kith and kin. By the 1980s, members of the diaspora started making films, portraying the lives of Telugus living abroad (e.g. *Padamati Sandhya Raagam* 1987). Bhat and Bhaskar (2007) have provided a vivid description of how members of the Telugu diaspora sought to reaffirm their identity as Telugus through establishing and listening to Telugu Radio, watching Telugu films, founding Telugu caste and language associations, and starting Telugu film and cultural websites. The Telugu diaspora encouraged films of all genres that reiterated modernist and conventional values.

Even the latest film, *Baahubali – The Beginning* (2015), is not a postmodern film that promotes consumer culture. It is a folk story, but its filmization completely availed itself of modern technology, especially graphics, and is on a par with Hollywood in terms of technical expertise. Rajamouli's earlier film *Magadheera* (*The Heroic Man* 2009) also grossed huge earnings. In the last decade, a number of Telugu films starring Balakrishna, Venkatesh, Pawan Kalyan, Mahesh Babu, etc. grossed the highest earnings in the overseas markets, but none of these films belong to the postmodern ethos. Films that gross the highest revenues, including the latest one that stars Mahesh Babu, *Srimanthudu* (*A Wealthy Man* 2015), was produced simultaneously in three south Indian languages and preserves the ancient rich cultural values of India in general and of south India in particular. This pattern of Tollywood productions of retaining traditional and religious values while conveying socially relevant messages is in stark contrast with Bollywood postmodern films.

Tollywood's performance challenges the myth that only Bollywood postmodern films' gross takings are high abroad due to their identification with the lifestyles of diaspora (see Table 2.7.29.1). Bollywood's themes relating to the diaspora overseas locations for the entirety of films are cited as major reasons for success.

But, without adopting any of the above as part of the narrative, Tollywood gross takings abroad have been steadily increasing since 2009 and have paralleled the gross takings

Table 2.7.29.1 Top ten Bollywood films at global box office

| Film | Year | UK | N. America | Rest of World | Overseas Total |
|--------------------------------|------|-----|------------|---------------|----------------|
| <i>My Name is Khan</i> | 2010 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 11.1 | 19.2 |
| <i>Three Idiots</i> | 2009 | 2.8 | 6.5 | 6.0 | 15.3 |
| <i>Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna</i> | 2006 | 3.8 | 3.2 | 3.6 | 10.7 |
| <i>Om Shanti Om</i> | 2007 | 2.7 | 3.6 | 3.7 | 10.0 |
| <i>Dhoom 2</i> | 2006 | 2.3 | 2.6 | 3.6 | 8.5 |
| <i>Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi</i> | 2008 | 2.2 | 2.0 | 4.1 | 8.4 |
| <i>Veer Zaara</i> | 2004 | 3.8 | 2.9 | 1.4 | 8.2 |
| <i>Kabhi Kushi Kabhie Gham</i> | 2001 | 3.6 | 3.1 | 1.3 | 8.0 |
| <i>Jodha Akbar</i> | 2008 | 2.1 | 3.4 | 2.0 | 7.5 |
| <i>Don</i> | 2006 | 2.7 | 2.2 | 2.5 | 7.4 |

Source: <http://boxofficeindia.com>, viewed 20 April 2016, figures in millions of US dollars.

of Bollywood postmodern films (see Table 2.7.29.2). Almost all the films included in Table 2.7.29.2 are highly traditional in the narrative of the stories/themes, and reinforce age-old religious and cultural values. Further, Tollywood is credited with the production of a spectrum of genres that Bollywood has never experimented with (e.g. *Magadheera* [2009] is a fantasy film combining socio-folk genres; *Eega* [2012 – *House Fly*] is a socio-scientific fantasy). Similarly, the multi-star film *Manam* (*Ourselves* 2014), the last film starring veteran actor and Dadasaheb Phalke awardee, the late Akkineni Nageswara Rao, is a complex story about reincarnation (*punarjanma* – rebirth – which is a belief based on the *Upanishads*). The film was a great success both in India and abroad, winning several awards and grossing \$1.5 million. *Magadheera* and *Eega* are also based on the theme of reincarnation.

Telugu films directed by Adurthi Subba Rao (1912–75), Kadira Venkata Reddy (1912–72), Vedantam Raghavaiah (1919–71), Gudavalli Ramabrahmam (1902–46), Kasinathuni Viswanath (popularly known as K. Viswanath; 1939–present), Bapu (1933–2014), Jandhyala Subramanya Sastry (1951–2001), Vamsi (1956–present), Dasari Narayana Rao (1947–present), K. Raghavendra Rao (1942–present) and K. Balachander (1930–2014) not only revolve around social issues that have dogged Indian society for over six decades, but also present ancient Indian cultural and traditional values (Murthy 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). Within this sociological and philosophical framework, these eminent directors have sought to enlighten Indian audiences with paths to inclusiveness, addressing the concerns of young people, women and adults (Murthy 2014). Viswanath's films *Sankarabharanam* (1979) and *Saagara Sangamam* (1983) have greatly helped to revive

Table 2.7.29.2 Top 14 Tollywood (Telugu) movies at global box office 2011–15

| No. | Title of the Film | Year | Studio | Overseas Revenue |
|-----|---|------|---|------------------|
| 1 | <i>Baahubali – The Beginning</i> | 2015 | Arka Media Works | 8.1 |
| 2. | <i>Srimanthudu</i> | 2015 | Mythri Movie Makers | 2.6 |
| 3. | <i>Attarintiki Daredi</i> | 2013 | Reliance Entertainment, Sri Venkateswara Chitra | 1.9 |
| 4. | <i>Seethamma Vakitlo Sirimalle Chettu</i> | 2013 | Sri Venkateswara Creations | 1.6 |
| 5. | <i>Dookudu</i> | 2011 | 14 Reels Entertainment | 1.5 |
| 6. | <i>Manam</i> | 2014 | Annapoorna Studios | 1.5 |
| 7. | <i>Aagadu</i> | 2014 | 14 Reels Entertainment | 1.4 |
| 8. | <i>Race Gurram</i> | 2014 | Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Productions | 1.3 |
| 9. | <i>I: Nenokkadine</i> | 2014 | 14 Reels Entertainment | 1.3 |
| 10. | <i>Baadshah</i> | 2013 | Parameswara Art Productions | 1.2 |
| 11. | <i>S/O Satyamurthy</i> | 2015 | Haarika and Hassine Creations | 1.2 |
| 12. | <i>Eega</i> | 2012 | Vaarahi Chalana Chitram | 1.0 |
| 13. | <i>Temper</i> | 2015 | Parameshwara Art Productions | 1.0 |
| 14. | <i>Gabbar Singh</i> | 2012 | Parameshwara Art Productions | 1.0 |

Source: [https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_highestgrossing_Tollywood_\(Telugu\)_movies](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_highestgrossing_Tollywood_(Telugu)_movies), accessed on 23 August 2015, figures in millions of US dollars.

interest in classical arts among Indian youth in India, with millions once again rushing to classical music and dance (Baskaran 1991).

Telugu cinema is an industry leader in India in producing and directing epic films based on the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavatam* and films about folklore (Murthy 2012, 2013). Telugu cinema, even today, continues to produce and direct films based on epics and on the lives of Telugu saints (*Annamayya* 1997; *Sri Ramadasu* 2006; *Sri Rama Rajyam* 2011; *Pandurangadu* 2008).

Backed by Ramoji Film City (RFC) in Hyderabad – the ‘World’s Largest Film Studio Complex’ according to the *Guinness Book of World Records* – Tollywood is the richest film industry in India (Shanti 2010). Aside from RFC there are many other large studios – Annapoorna Studios, Saaradhi Studios, Padmalaya Studios and Rama Naidu Studios – that have world-class infrastructure that allows the shooting of films with Hollywood production values. The film processing laboratories (such as Prasad Labs), the graphic and animation subsidiary software units, and the idyllic locales in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana make Tollywood an attractive choice of location for film shooting not only for Telugu language productions but others as well. The contributions of the Telugu television industry, with 54 Telugu channels (the highest number in any Indian state) in general and ETV for programmes like *Paaduta Teeyaga – Americalo Raagasaagarika* and *Swaraabhishekam* (both being shown in the UK and the US since 2015) in particular, to the cultural renaissance of the Indian diaspora should also be noted.

Classical music traditions: Carnatic music exuded from Telugu Saints – Annamayyah, Ramadasu and Tyagaraja

The world repertoire of music would be seriously deficient if one failed to mention the fundamental contributions of Carnatic music, which is primarily an expression, in Telegu, of the devotion of holy saints. These saints are described as *Vaaggeyakars* (whose spoken words instantaneously turn into mellifluous *keertan*, a form of devotional music, enacted in praise of their beloved deity).

A fifteenth-century saint, Annamayyah of Tallapaka village (now located in Cuddapah district of Andhra Pradesh), orally composed and sang nearly 33,000 *keertans* about his favorite deity, Lord Sri Venkateswara. The sixteenth-century saint Ramadasa of Bhadrachalam composed and sang more than 20,000 *keertans* in praise of Lord Sri Rama and his holy consort Seeta Devi. A seventeenth-century saint, Tyagaraja of Tiruvayyar, composed about 50,000 *keertans* in praise of Lord Rama. Tyagaraja and his disciples, Shyama Sastri and Muttuswami Dikshitar, who together are called the Holy Trinity of Music, perfected the Carnatic tradition of music. The Telugu film industry has been prolific in using the Carnatic musical tradition. As such, Tollywood films, perpetuating Indian cultural values and traditions as they do, are exportable cultural products that could very well replace Bollywood as India’s flagship soft power asset.

Conclusion

This chapter questions the current meta-theorization of Bollywood that gives Bollywood the status of flagship soft power asset. First the chapter engages with Nye’s definitions of soft power (2011) and Chitty’s (Ch.1) definition of public diplomacy which recognizes “the diasporic nature of populations” vis-à-vis heritage and contemporary sources. Centering on this premise, the chapter examined whether Bollywood films, described as

postmodern exportable cultural goods (Rajadhyaksha 2013; Thussu 2013), really convey Indian heritage to the diaspora. Many policymakers and Bollywoodized academics place ancient Indian heritage on a par with contemporary culture such as exportable Bollywood films. They fail to note the contradictions in suggesting that Bollywood films may carry the universalist and assimilationist values in India's heritage.

Further, the chapter examined the hollowness of postmodern Bollywood films; they do not offer a universal political and cultural model (Wagner 2010; Blarel 2012). The present study showed how the Telugu film industry not only performed very well in the global cinema marketplace, but also reinforced traditional Indian values and culture in connecting with Telugu diaspora without resorting to producing postmodern films. The chapter further dealt with the contribution of the Telugu film industry to art forms such as classical Carnatic music and classical *Bharatanatyam* dance (Murthy 2014; Murthy 2015; Murthy *et al.* 2015). Tollywood's multiculturalism, its ability to produce multiple genres ranging from fantasies to folk tales via epic/*puranic* themes (Murthy 2013), and their success in the global marketplace, very much qualifies it as a strong contender for the position of India's flagship soft power asset. The present assumption that Bollywood should be the flagship Indian soft power asset needs to be re-examined.

Notes

- 1 Core value systems are based on *Upanishadic* scriptures and epics and other iconic texts; fine art includes classical Indian dance, music, painting, poetry and sculpture; traditional crafts include weaving and wood-carving.
- 2 Postmodern films break down the cultural divide between high and low art and often upend typical portrayals of gender, race, class, genre and time with the goal of creating something that does not abide by traditional narrative expression.
- 3 Rajadhyaksha (2003) described the academics who argue that Bollywood is synonymous with Indian cinema as Bollywoodized scholars.

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